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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 000291

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CG](#)
SUBJECT: EXAMINING BAS-CONGO'S FEBRUARY VIOLENCE

REF: A. KINSHASA 134

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 136

[1](#)C. KINSHASA 240

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: A poorly-planned search by police sparked the January 31-February 1 violence between security forces and members of the ethnic separatist group Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) which left dozens dead in the DRC's Bas-Congo province. Provincial political and security officials claim BDK leaders coordinated and premeditated the clashes with police. Several official inquiries are underway to determine responsibility for the events. The Interior Minister suspended several provincial police and intelligence officials for their roles and possible complicity in the attacks. End summary.

WHAT SPARKED THE VIOLENCE?

[1](#)2. (U) Clashes January 31-February 1 between the ethnic separatist group BDK and Congolese police and military forces in the DRC's westernmost province of Bas-Congo (refs A and B) were portrayed in media reports as a protest of an allegedly corrupt vote in which Ne Muanda Nsemi, BDK's spiritual leader, lost the race for vice-governor to an ally of President Joseph Kabila. PolOff visited Bas-Congo the week of February 26 to assess the aftermath of the violence and speak with political and security officials in Matadi, Boma and Muanda, where the heaviest fighting occurred.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The officials who managed the crisis -- including police and military commanders, city and territory administrators, and the governor -- presented a uniform account blaming BDK for the events. All government observers agreed that less than 24 hours of violence left at least 86 dead, including ten military and police. MONUC and human rights groups have reported a higher death toll of over 100. The sequence and causes of events which follow are based on the best information available to Bas-Congo officials. They admit, however, their version of what occurred is incomplete, as many did not witness the actual fighting while barricaded in their homes or offices.

A BOTCHED SEARCH

[1](#)4. (SBU) All government and security officials in the provincial capital of Matadi agreed the crisis began after police issued a search warrant January 31 to search for weapons at a Matadi residence of suspected BDK adherents.

Matadi Mayor Jean-Marc Lukombo said intelligence reports alleged they had stockpiled weapons, including machetes and firearms, in the house. He added that security officials were concerned BDK protesters would use the arms during a demonstration announced for February 1 in protest of the January gubernatorial elections.

15. (C) Outgoing Bas-Congo Governor Jacques Mbandu, a member of President Kabila's political alliance, told us he opposed the search. He claimed he believed the intelligence was shaky and that the suspected BDK members did not pose a sufficient security threat to raid the property. Both Lukombo and Mbandu said the police inspector general and the provincial intelligence agency (ANR) chief insisted on executing the warrant, over objections of Mbandu and the regional military commander, General Mbuyama Nsiona.

16. (SBU) Judicial officials approved the warrant by mid-day January 31. Police forces, however, did not execute it until 7 p.m. Lt. Col. Emile Chalwe, the provincial director of police intelligence operations, said by the time security forces arrived at the suspect residence, BDK adherents had been tipped off and were awaiting the police. Confrontation quickly escalated and soon spilled into the city as BDK members began marching through Matadi. Chalwe said at this point the police returned to their barracks and only fired warning shots to disperse crowds. Nsiona said BDK members killed a FARDC soldier in uniform while he was purchasing cigarettes at a local market. A BDK mob also confronted a journalist with MONUC's Radio Okapi later in the evening and destroyed his vehicle. Chalwe said several killed and wounded BDK members were found at the residence February 1.

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REACTIONS QUICK AND VIOLENT

17. (C) Mbandu and other security officials in Boma and Muanda, respectively 30 and 75 miles west of Matadi, said BDK members began attacking police and government facilities in both towns in the early morning hours of February 1. Mbandu claimed the violence began in Boma and Muanda within hours of each other. He and Chalwe speculated that this was evidence of a "coordinated" BDK attack, though they had no proof of any advance planning.

POLICE OVERWHELMED, MILITARY CALLED IN

18. (U) BDK actions overwhelmed the small police forces in Boma and Muanda. Muanda territorial police inspector General William Samba said machete-wielding BDK attackers killed the city police chief in his office around 4 a.m. February 1, and a few hours later sacked and burned the Muanda territorial administrator's office. He said the 37-member Muanda police force did not have the resources to defend their positions against what he claimed was a group of nearly 500 protesters, and quickly retreated from the center of town. Governor Mbandu said BDK protesters in Boma killed two police officers and overwhelmed a police force of just a few dozen officers.

19. (SBU) Fearing near-complete civil disorder, Muanda territorial administrator Dieudonne Kowelo said he called the local FARDC commander, General Andre Bondjuka, who heads the nearby Kitona army training base, for reinforcements. Bondjuka said he deployed approximately 260 troops to Muanda by 11 a.m. to assist the police. He admitted that despite giving his troops an order not to fire, some of his forces shot and killed an unknown number of BDK members at their church compound after discovering the corpses of two military police officers. Bondjuka denied reports that FARDC troops fired rockets at protesters or at the BDK church. PolOff saw no evidence of a rocket attack at the BDK compound during a

brief visit February 26.

¶10. (SBU) Mbandu, likewise facing greater civil disruption, called Nsiona to dispatch troops to Matadi and Boma. Nsiona told us he deployed FARDC elements to help police remove roadblocks set up by BDK members overnight that had effectively cut off all land travel between Matadi and Kinshasa, approximately 150 miles to the northeast. Nsiona said he had given his troops orders not to fire. However, FARDC troops in Songololo about 40 miles east of Matadi fired on and killed eight BDK protesters who had thrown rocks at a commanding officer, seriously injuring him. FARDC troops also reportedly fired on civilians in Boma, though Nsiona defended the action, saying soldiers fired in self-defense against a crowd of BDK demonstrators he said were drugged and armed with machetes.

SECURITY OFFICIALS SUSPENDED

¶11. (C) Interior Minister Denis Kalume removed several high-ranking security officials from their commands following the incidents. Mbandu said those removed were General Mukendo, the head of police for Bas-Congo province, and two of his deputies, as well as the Bas-Congo ANR chief for insisting on the search that ultimately triggered the violence. Mbandu and Lukombo blame these officials for their poor handling of, and reaction to, the conflict. Mbandu also speculated the police chief and his deputies may have been complicit in leaking information to BDK followers about the pending police search of their residence.

DISPUTES OVER THE DEATH TOLL

¶12. (C) Bas-Congo security officials could not definitively state how many civilians the police or military may have killed but admit they were responsible for many of the deaths. Bondjuka defended the actions of his forces and suggested many in Muanda may have died from stray bullets fired into the air intended to disperse crowds. Nsiona also supported FARDC troops and accused the BDK of killing some of its own members as he claimed many bodies were discovered before troops intervened.

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¶13. (U) All Bas-Congo officials interviewed, however, provided the same death toll as the 86 given earlier by Interior Minister Kalume. Government officials said 16 were killed in Matadi, including the soldier buying cigarettes; eight civilians were killed in Songololo; in Boma, 25 civilians were killed, plus two police officers; in Muanda, a total of 35 died in the fighting, including four police officers and three military police.

¶14. (C) MONUC and human rights organizations dispute the official government death toll, contending more than 86 died. MONUC officials admit, however, their own earlier count of 134 dead was high. MONUC-Matadi Head of Office Marie Savadogo said their estimate was based on reports that the military had collected bodies and buried them before investigations had begun. Anneke van Woudenberg of Human Rights Watch, who recently visited Bas-Congo, told us February 28 she believed the toll was 124 dead and that government authorities had pressured hospital officials not to contradict the "official" count.

¶15. (U) A group of Congolese civil society organizations has claimed 30 died in the fighting in Boma, including two police officers. In a March 8 press conference, the group released a list identifying those who were killed, injured, arrested or have otherwise disappeared. The group claims the incidents in Boma began early the morning of February 1 when a FARDC

soldier killed an innocent civilian.

INQUIRIES UNDERWAY

¶16. (U) Several investigations have been launched into the events surrounding the Bas-Congo violence. MONUC dispatched a special adviser from SRSB William Swing's office to look into the use of force by the police and the FARDC. The National Assembly also agreed February 23 to create a special committee to investigate the issue; its members arrived in Bas-Congo March 6 (ref C). Religious groups have also sent envoys to Bas-Congo to examine issues of responsibility and the use of force.

COMMENT: BLAME ALL AROUND

¶17. (C) The police and military's use of deadly force clearly caused the majority of civilian deaths in Bas-Congo. It is not clear as to how many of these deaths can be attributed to poor police skills, or possibly motivation for revenge. Bundu dia Kongo members are not responsible for nearly as many, but it was they who attacked and killed police and military officers in Muanda and Boma without provocation. The clashes highlight the weaknesses of Congolese security forces, who must face demonstrators with little training in crowd control and only firearms for defense. In assessing the events of this tragedy, one key factor was the eagerness of security officials to conduct the January 31 raid, despite shaky evidence, which sparked the crisis. End comment.
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